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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - North Korea Missile Tests  
PARIS - Thursday, July 06, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

North Korea Missile Tests

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

While the victory of France over Portugal in the World Cup semi finals dominates the majority of today's headlines, the North Korean missile tests are the topic of a number of editorials and analyses.

Francois Sergent in left-of-center Liberation notes that President Bush is "spinning around the Axis of Evil." Sergent quotes Henry Kissinger, who said that the format of current negotiations with Iran... and with North Korea is "highly dysfunctional" enabling the two countries to "play off of each other." On state-run France 2's evening newscast the reporter said that the North Korean missile tests are "intentionally political," that North Korea is pushing to be treated like Iran and that while North Korea is "used to testing the limits of the international community," this is "a dangerous game in which Kim Jong Il could get burned." (See Part C)

Press reports on the North Korean tests agree that they serve to strengthen the military and political alliance between the U.S. and Japan. "This alliance is summed up in the Security Treaty signed by the two countries some fifty years ago: 'Any country that attacks Japan, attacks, de facto, the U.S.'" notes left-of-center Liberation's correspondent in Tokyo.

In right-of-center Le Figaro a full page of op-eds is devoted to Iran. Ramin Parham, Iranian thinker and president of the Franco-Iranian Committee for Democracy in Iran, writes that "faced with theocratic fanaticism, diplomacy is pointless." Seyed Ali Moujani, Charg d'Affaires at the Iranian embassy in Paris, however, insists that "Iran has the right to nuclear technology." Nicole Gnesotto, Director of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, says that the "Iranian Crisis is a Test for Europe's Security Policies." "The shift in the American position, agreeing in principal to direct talks after over 25 years of diplomatic silence, is a major victory with regard to Europe's determination and strategy... Of course we must remain extremely cautious concerning the final outcome of the Iranian crisis... but the latest steps taken are decisive... They show that when Europe is united it can have real influence, in particular on its American partner. Divided, as Europe was at the outset of the Iraqi conflict, it simply does not count. In a world that must become by definition, multi-polar... strengthening the EU's influence on each of the world's strategic poles should be Europe's only objective."

Left-of-center Le Monde's front page says that: "Baghdad is Under the Rule of Warlords and Islamists." A two-page article by the daily's correspondent in Baghdad, Patrice Claude, paints a grim picture of day-to-day life in Iraq with violence, assassinations, and intimidation running rife. Claude says that "when the virus of fanaticism infects youths who are pathologically ignorant and often illiterate it becomes lethal."

Catholic La Croix gives a brief account of the six French nationals captured by the U.S. in Afghanistan. Their trial began in Paris yesterday. All six men traveled to Afghanistan through London-based clandestine networks. Once in Afghanistan, they had direct links to al-Qaeda either through enrollment in Koranic schools or by training at military camps. A French diplomatic telegram published in left-of-center Liberation yesterday referred to intelligence agents who conducted interviews with the suspects at least twice while at Guantanamo. Defense lawyers are claiming that these interviews violated their clients' rights. France 3 television last night aired a report in which one defense lawyer said that the entire trial is "underhanded." The defense has asked for the case to be thrown out and for France to be sentenced by the European Court. The journalist pointed out the irony in the fact that the telegram stressed the "excellent cooperation of French intelligence with the Americans at Guantanamo" while the French government was openly denouncing the illegality of the detention center. An editorial in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace says that "this contradiction could be very damaging for the image of France on the other side of the Atlantic."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:  
North Korea Missile Tests

"Diplomacy on the Edge of the Abyss"

Philippe Pons pens an analysis in left-of-center Le Monde (07/06): "Until now Pyongyang's regime has shown that it is much less unpredictable than thought and that it is skillfully playing the few cards that it still has in hand... From the point of view of the North Koreans, the U.S. nuclear agreement with India and the ongoing negotiations with Iran (which possesses a much less advanced nuclear program than North Korea) are proof of the little regard that Washington has for Pyongyang... North Korea may think that the time has come to open a new front, or at least create a diversion while Washington remains mired in the Iraqi conflict and is condemned to keep waiting in its tug-of-war with Teheran. From Pyongyang's point of view, Washington today is being forced to negotiate with the 'bad guys' (Iranians, Iraqi insurgents...). But the surprise may come from China, to what point will the Chinese put up with North Korea's provocations...? Provocations which will also reinforce the U.S.-Japanese military alliance - and it should be noted that Japan is inclined to adopt a hard line stance vis-à-vis North Korea. The U.S., for its part, is becoming increasingly impatient ... but is at an impasse, Democrats and Republicans alike are urging George W. Bush to change tactics. The American wait-and-see attitude, along with sanctions and arm waving have proved fruitless with North Korea but the U.S. continues to refuse direct dialogue... After including North Korea in the 'axis of evil' with Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Washington, today, seems to be minimizing the threat level that North Korea represents... a reticence that could indicate a certain degree of embarrassment."

"Iran - North Korea: The Axis of Blackmail"

Stephane Marchand editorializes in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/06): "The concert of protestations from the international community is music to Pyongyang's ears. Irritated since September 2005 by the stalemate of the six-way negotiations on the subject of his nuclear program, Kim Jong Il is trying to win back the upper hand with regard to the U.S. in order to establish a direct dialogue with the superpower... To be able to exist on the international scene, North Korea, which has a disastrous economic situation... only possesses two things with which to scare: its rudimentary nuclear weapons... and the missiles that it builds and exports. Over the course of the last ten years the country has consummately wielded these two instruments of blackmail. This blackmail, that some would call deterrence, has been fruitful. Condoleezza Rice... implicitly promised last year that the U.S. would not engage in military strikes against North Korea. This military and diplomatic toing and froing is being closely watched in the Middle East, where the invasion of Iraq proved one thing: it is better to have real weapons of mass destruction if one is on Washington's blacklist... On the 'Axis of Blackmail' the Islamic Republic and the Communist dictatorship mutually copy one another... Both of them are intent on wreaking havoc, biding their time and using the threat of the bomb to protect their regimes."

"Washington Seeking Not to Fall Into a Trap"

Washington correspondent Philippe Gelie writes in right-of-center Le Figaro: "If Kim Jong Il wanted to steal Iranian president Ahmadinejad's thunder by becoming the lead trouble maker in the world, he succeeded pretty well. With a salvo of missiles launched on the same day as the take-off of the shuttle Discovery, the day the U.S. observed July 4 - when Americans had their eyes riveted to the sky to watch the fireworks, and while George Bush was celebrating his 60th birthday (which is today) with 150 guests invited in Washington, the least one can say is that the 'provocation' did not go unnoticed. But if it was intended to destabilize the American Administration it definitely failed... Immediately the White House reacted in a calibrated way condemning Pyongyang's actions and insisting on a diplomatic solution to the issue."

"Beijing - Pyongyang: The Temptation to Let Go"

Alexandre Adler in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/06): "The only thing that is saving North Korea right now is the fact that the U.S. is entirely focalized on the Middle East... Americans see only the benefits of putting off until later a confrontation with North Korea..."

"Bogged Down"

In left-of-center Liberation the editorial by Antoine de Gaudemar (07/06): "For the time being George W. Bush is stalling by putting the emphasis on diplomacy as opposed to the use of force, a use of force that the hawks in the Administration would like to see used against North Korea. If truth be told, President Bush does not really have a choice. He is mired down in Iraq and at odds with Russia and China... Despite the fundamental importance of the non-proliferation treaty, the international community seems to be incapable of blocking the road to nuclear weapons... and applies a double standard when it allows a country like India to acquire the bomb."

"Missiles"

Communist l'Humanite's editorial by Maurice Ulrich: (07/06): "Are the missile tests proof of the absurd blindness of a paranoid and megalomaniac power or a last ditch attempt to get the attention of the international community? The answer is: perhaps both. For years North Korea has been dangerously shilly-shallying with the U.S. to

get economic aid and diplomatic recognition... The official reactions of world leaders do not tell the whole story. Nuclear powers, France among them, continue to preach to a dozen other countries 'do as I say, not as I do.' The club of nuclear powers is a very closed one that is, not surprisingly, hostile to general nuclear disarmament. Remember just a few months ago President Chirac made the case for reinforcing France's powers of deterrence... And while France condemns the tests it should also plead for dialogue, for transparency for a stronger relationship between the UN and the international community, and not just with the members of the 'club.'" STAPLETON